
Missing Citizens

LIFE ON THE STREETS OF DHAKA

*Results of a Study Conducted on the
Street Duellers of Dhaka City*



**Association for Socio Economic Advancement of Bangladesh (ASEAB)
and
Together for Service of People (TSP)**

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Key explorations

Education:

- The majority of the street dwellers have some level of education. A significant portion of these people have education above the primary level. However, 42% of the street dwellers are illiterate.

Job:

- The present professions of the street dwellers are not skill based. Most of the street dwellers do not have any specific job. Most of them engage themselves in whatever job is available.

Income and Expenditure:

- The majority of these street dwellers earn more than 40 taka a day which seems to be good enough considering the fact that food is very cheap for them in different forms. Thus most of the street dwellers can afford to have three meals a day. Some of them even save money. However, few of the street dwellers face extreme hardships as they earn not more than 20 taka a day, and the proportion of such people is not negligible.

Oppression:

- The majority of the surveyed street dwellers are never tortured by anybody. However, 45 percent of them have faced different forms of tortures. Police is the major among those who torture. Almost a quarter of the surveyed street dwellers have been tortured by the police. Among the other oppressors, the *mastans* and gatekeepers are the major ones.

Children:

- Children have been found to be the most vulnerable group to be involved in dangerous crimes such as carrying illegal arms, explosives, and drug, pick pocketing, serving the hoodlums as informers, mugging, and even killing.

Street, not slum:

- Most of the street dwellers prefer to stay in the street instead of slum for freedom. They hardly enjoy living in the slum. They are not obligated to pay rent, tolls etc. while they are in the street.

Water and sanitation:

- More than half of the respondents use public toilets with payment. A bath with limited water costs five taka each time. They pay higher than we pay!

I INTRODUCTION

Street dwellers are the homeless people of the city. Though out of focus, these floating people constitute a significant portion of the huge population of Dhaka, the Capital and by far the largest urban centre of Bangladesh. Although the actual number of these people can not be definitely said, it is assumed that quite a few hundred thousands float across the city. Children constitute a major part of them. According to an estimate done in 2000, the number of street children in Dhaka City is more than 3.3 million (GOB 2001). With the children are the adolescents and the adults. All together, it's a huge population.

A continuous influx of low-income people from rural to urban areas of Bangladesh started since independence. Being recognised as the most important place to earn livelihood the capital city encountered a huge influx of people from all over the country, which created pressure on the utilities available in the city. The migrated people squatted on government lands, roadside lands, abandoned lands and buildings. The situation has worsened over the years resulting in severe environmental pollution, health hazard and social problems and is now of great concern to the policy makers, planners and researchers. Among these urban poor, the street dwellers face the worst situation. They are facing social exclusion, physical abuse, gender discrimination, sexual abuse, heavy work burden, neglect, terrorism etc. These problems have been addressed and a number of initiatives have so far been taken by different government and non-government agencies. However, the outcome has been far beyond the actual requirement. An in-depth study is very much critical to map the whole situation and find a long lasting solution to it.

The street dwellers of Dhaka City is often labelled only as criminals, sex traders, drug sellers, and muggers etc without that much of study being conducted on them. While a number of attempts have been taken by different agencies and individuals to study the situation of the floating people, most of those attempts have had particular focus on particular groups or sections of these people. Most of the studies done largely focused on the street children and to some extent on the adolescents (not necessarily the street adolescents only). However, hardly any holistic effort to study the street dwellers of all ages, sexes and occupations has been undertaken. As a result, these people have continuously remained outside the attention of the policy makers on one hand and on the other hand they have always been considered to be related with all sorts of criminal activities of the city without any proven ground. Although in no way sufficient to fill this gap, this study has attempted some sorts of explorations to uncover another face of this 'beautiful' city.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale for undertaking this study is to have a preliminary exposure to the socio-economic status of the street dwellers, furthering the scope of conducting a baseline study. In addition, such a study is expected to find out the areas of possible interventions for the street dwellers to empower and make them socially acceptable and thus reducing the social deprivation they face to a large extent.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Broader Objective

To explore and analyse the prevailing situation of the street dwellers of Dhaka city

Specific Objectives

- ❑ To understand the socio-economic background of the street dwellers
- ❑ To identify the potential root causes of their vulnerable position
- ❑ To primarily assess the needs of the street dwellers
- ❑ To identify potential areas of intervention

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study purposively avoided sticking to any rigid quantitative or qualitative approach. Instead, it employed a mixture of both the approaches for securing the best results. Case studies have complemented the survey instrument to have in-depth microscopic focus on the real situation of the street dwellers.

Literature Review: Attempts were made to review the available research, studies conducted by various organisations working on the issue and consulting the existing journals, books and even the newspapers to have a better understanding about the intensity of the problem.

Data from Primary Sources: In order to collect data from the field an open ended semi-structured interview schedule was developed and pre-tested. Seven researchers (both male and female) collected data from the field. The schedule was further revised as per the feedback from the field test and later it was finalized.

Tools used for data collection:

- i. An open ended semi-structured Interview schedule
- ii. Checklist for case studies

Orientation of the Field Workers: A brain storming session was conducted with the field workers and some researchers to define the methodology. The field workers were given sufficient orientation on the data collection instruments and they were given a guideline on the most effective ways of data collection.

Sampling: A stratified random sampling approach was followed to draw the sample. At first 26 locations in the city were selected randomly and then a total number of 366 respondents were drawn on a random basis. The size of the sample was determined according to available resources and time limit.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The time and resources allocated were not sufficient enough to have an in-depth understanding in such a complex and multidimensional issue and conduct a study of sufficient breadth and depth on it. Again lack of time and resources barred the team to consult the secondary materials properly. To understand the diversity of the sampled population, the findings should have been separated for children, girls and the aged, which has not been possible.

II PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Who are these People?

According to the *Census of Slum Areas and Floating Population 1997* done by the BBS, more than three fourths of the floating population in Dhaka City are male. The sample for this study is also dominated by male counting for about 70% of the total sample size of 366. In terms age, children are dominant. More than 55% of the total sampled population age below 15. Proportion of the people aging over 45 is negligible (less than 3%). Table 2-1 presents the distribution of respondents by sex and table 2-2 shows their distribution by age.

Where do they live?

The street dwellers spread all over the city. Accordingly, the sampled people were drawn from as many as 26 locations of the city. Table 2-3 presents the detailed distribution of the respondents according to the locations. As single location, Usmany Uddyan dominates with 47 out of the 366 respondents. Good numbers of sampled people were also drawn from bus and rail stations, launch terminal, *mazar* and *bazar* areas.

What do they do?

It is quite difficult to definitely identify the occupations of the street dwellers. While many are involved in multi-dimensional activities, there are also problems of hiding and misreporting. However, the survey tried to identify two occupations for each of the participants, the main and the secondary ones. The result shows that it is the street children, service holders and beggars who dominate. More than three quarters of the respondents have no secondary occupation. Table 2-4 presents the main occupation of the respondents and table 2-5 presents their secondary occupations. The study identified 14 different professions, few of which are seasonal (e.g. cake (*pitha*) making during the winter, selling of seasonal fruits etc).

Table 2-1: Distribution of respondents by sex

Male	Female	Total
253	113	366
69.13%	30.87%	100%

Table 2-2: Distribution of respondent by age groups

<11	12-15	16-18	19-25	26-45	45+	Total
86	117	40	61	52	10	366
23.50%	31.97%	10.93%	16.67%	14.21%	2.73%	100 %

Table 2-3: Distribution of respondent according to present living location

Location	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agargaon	4	1.09
Beri bundh	19	5.19
Mirpur Mazar	26	7.10
Kamlapur Rail station	14	3.82
Press club	2	0.54
Stadium	9	2.45

Mohammadpur	5	1.36
Waizghat	15	4.09
Sadarghat	23	6.28
High court Mazar	38	10.38
Tejgaon Rail station	6	1.63
Kawran bazaar	29	7.92
Mohakhali bus stand	18	4.91
Airport	17	4.64
Gabtolli bus stand	9	2.45
Botanical garden	2	0.54
Shawardi uddan	6	1.63
Postagola	15	4.09
Ramna park	9	2.45
Azimpur	6	1.63
Farmgate	15	4.09
Saidabad	16	4.37
Sher e Bangla Nagar	4	1.09
Chandrima uddayan	10	2.73
Ostmani Uddan	47	12.84
Nagar Bhaban	2	0.54
Total	366	100

Table 2-4: Distribution of respondent by their present occupation

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Beggar	49	13.39
Coolie	40	10.93
Floating Tea Hawker	23	6.28
Tokai (street children)	79	21.58
Push card	14	3.83
Flower seller	18	4.92
Water seller	17	4.64
Service holder	58	15.85
Maid servant	4	1.09
Thief	2	0.55
Rickshaw pulling	6	1.64
Shoe polisher	6	1.64

Sex worker	14	3.83
Pitha (cake) maker	36	9.83
Total	366	100

Table 5: Distribution of respondent by their secondary occupation

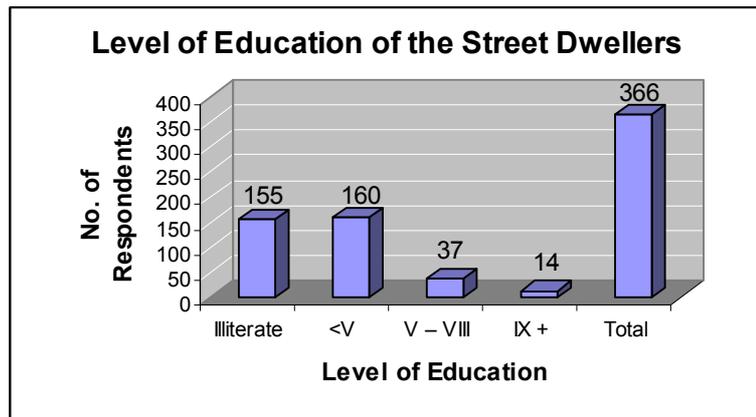
Secondary Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
No occupation	280	76.50
Employee	14	3.83
Tea seller	11	3
Beggar	16	4.37
Rickshaw van puller	7	1.91
Water seller	6	1.64
Coolie	12	3.28
Tokai (street children)	12	3.28
Sex worker	5	1.37
Shoe polisher	1	0.27
Pitha seller	1	0.27
Chocolate seller	1	0.27
Total	366	100

III FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The study has come up with interesting findings about the street dwellers. Some of these findings may seem to be quite striking. The findings that follow are expected to provide the readers with useful insights about the life and livelihood of the street dwellers. As already mentioned in the section on methodology, these findings are the results of not only the sample survey but also of qualitative observations and data collection by the field researchers. Therefore, everywhere the data are not quantified and at times do not lead to any definite conclusion.

Most of the street dwellers have at least some level of education

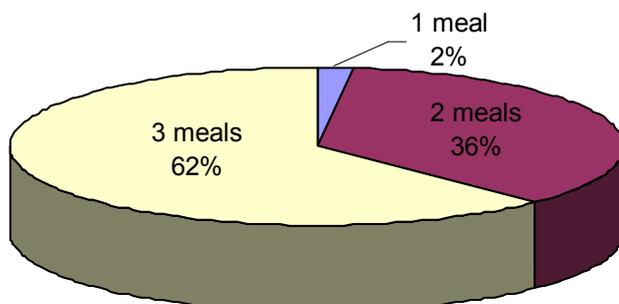
The study reveals that the majority of the surveyed street dwellers are at least literate. They have varying levels of education. The largest group (44%) has the ones having education below the primary level followed by the illiterate group (42%). People having education above the primary level are also quite significant in numbers, 51 out of 366, that is, 14% of the surveyed street dwellers. Table 3-1 presents the distribution of the surveyed street dwellers by their level of education.



Most of them earn enough to eat enough

Most of the street dwellers do not have any specific job. Due to competitive labour market there is a grave uncertainty in getting job. Hence most of them engage themselves in whatever job is available. Thus the current professions of the street dwellers are not skill based. The majority of these street dwellers earn more than 40 taka a day which seems to be good enough, considering the fact that very few of them have any responsibilities in maintaining families. However, few of these people face extreme hardships as they earn not more than 20 taka a day. The percentage of such people is not negligible (it's about 10%). Normally, the street dwellers count on cash only, not kind. 17% said that their income was over Tk. 81. The study also reveals some interesting features of the income of the street dwellers. For example, it has been found that a *tokai* could earn as high as Tk. 100 to 150 a day of which they spend the lion share on food. Table 3-2 shows the average daily income of the surveyed street dwellers.

Meals Per Day Taken by the Street Dwellers



The street dwellers do not have to always depend on their income for food intake. Food is comparatively cheaper in Dhaka City for the street dwellers. There are many options for them to get foods in cheap. These include supply from the community centres and from the hotels etc. The surplus foods for Police are also sold at a cheaper rate on the street. Food is not a problem

at the High Court and Mirpur Mazars. Most of the respondents (63%) informed that they could have 3 meals a day. Only 2% expressed that they could have only one meal a day. Most of the single persons do not cook and shares foods with families that cook in an open place with wood and leaves. Table 3-3 presents the distribution of the street dwellers by the number of meals they take per day.

Some of them even save money!

Table 3-4 shows that most of the respondents do not save money. However, the ones having at least some savings constitute a significant proportion (almost one third of the total street dwellers surveyed). The reason behind not saving money is not only their level of income, but also the fact that they do not have any safe place to keep their savings. One boy has been found who deposited Tk. 1500 to a shopkeeper and failed to get that money back.

Why in the street?

The study has come up with a list of factors behind the street dwellers' move to migrate to Dhaka. Almost all in the list are push factors (e.g., poverty, river erosion etc). More than a quarter of the surveyed street dwellers have come to Dhaka being pushed by their poverty in their villages. Note that the BBS 1997 census found that the prime cause of migrating to Dhaka was search for job/employment (41.75%). Most of the street dwellers do not shift places (Table 3-5) unless there is a police raid that compels them to move to surrounding areas, but they do not ultimately leave the place. Among the factors there are some which are not strictly socio-economic, e.g. being lost, torture of step mother etc. Table 3-6 lists the causes of migration to Dhaka by the street dwellers.

An overwhelming majority (77%) of the surveyed street dwellers themselves choose to stay in Dhaka and 20.5% of them are staying without having any other choice, while a little over 2% of them have no thought regarding their choice of staying (see Table 3-7).

Torture and oppression

The majority of the surveyed street dwellers are never tortured by anybody. However, 45 percent of them face different forms of tortures. Police is the major among those who torture. Almost a quarter of the surveyed street dwellers have been tortured by the police. Among the other oppressors, the *mastans* and gatekeepers are the major ones. Unfortunate is the fact that most of the tortures and oppressions on these people remain unnoticed as they do not possess any legal right to protest against the oppressions. Table 3-8 distributes the respondents by the agents of tortures done on them.

Apart from these physical tortures there are psycho-social pressures from the affluent section of the society. Though the well-off section of the society depends on them for services/odd jobs, they hardly ever recognize their contributions. To them these street dwellers are nothing more than dirty people – a bunch of criminals.

Water, sanitation and medication: They pay higher!

More than half of the respondents use public toilets with payment. A bath with limited water costs Tk. 5 each time. Table 3-9 shows the distribution of the respondents by means of sanitation. As other means of defecation and bath using roadside and *mazar* areas are the major ones. Among the major sources of water for drinking and daily use are supply, pond or river and hotel or mosques. Table 3-10 shows the distribution of the surveyed street dwellers by sources of water.

Street dwellers cannot afford to consult doctors when they are sick. Usually they take resort to the services of paramedics or drug sellers. And a significant portion of these people do

not go for any option. They just wait for getting well when they are sick. Table 3-11 shows how the street dwellers are medicated.

Street dwellers do need entertainment

Sources of entertainment for the street dwellers are many. Television and cinema are the major ones among them. Whatever hardships and uncertainties they face, they somehow manage to avail entertainment from these sources. Table 3-12 presents the means of entertainment for the surveyed street dwellers.

Assets

Most of the street dwellers have no visible asset except their own belongings i.e. clothe, mosquito nets, polythene sheets etc. Sometimes those are also stolen by their fellow comrades and could be bought in a cheaper price.

ZAMILA'S STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The platform of Kamalapur Railway Station has become the permanent den of many floating people. There are about 100 families living in the squatter settlements mushroomed beside the bordering wall at the south of the platform. The dwellers having diversified profession include labourers, rickshaw pullers, rag pickers, cigarette and tea vendors and hawkers. Zamila is one of the dwellers of this settlement. She was found at the platform having three big bouds with rice, vegetables and fishes kept on a wooden bench in front of her. She appeared to be in her mid-thirties having good health and wearing a torn saree.

Zamila came from a village named Bagadi in Arai Hazar Thana of Narayanganj, a neighbouring district of Dhaka. About her work she informed, "I supply food to the coolie and labourer of the station during lunch time and earn about Taka 100-150 a day. I am happy with my life now." But things were not easy for Zamila at the beginning.

Zamila was divorced by her husband just six months after her marriage. She along with her mother used to beg in her village, which could not earn them three meals a day. Then both of them came to Dhaka in search of better prospect and started begging and having good days. A rickshaw puller was also living with them and he developed good relationship with her mother. She married her off to that man. One day Zamila came to know that he was married earlier and had wife and children. The marriage did not last long. Having no alternative for survival she started this makeshift hotel business selling foods to the labourers. Her mother does not have to beg any more. Life is now much better than ever before. But the police remain as the greatest problem creator in their business. Zamila has to pay the police toll everyday. While the interview with her was going on, Suddenly a person came to her running and informed her about the police raid. She immediately stopped talking and ran away to a safer place with her bouds to escape harassment of police. The police was then watched demolishing Zamila's makeshift establishment. It was known that the police often come here for extortion. Zamila are to pay tolls for so-called illegal business and settlement to the police. If they are unable to pay, the consequence is serious, they are to suffer torture. There are thousands of Zamilas in our country, who are to encounter repression and exploitation each and everyday to earn their subsistence. How long will it continue?

Identity Crisis

There is no specific data on the street dwellers and they don't have any legal identity. Government is found unwilling to support them and resorting to slum eviction in various reasons without any proper rehabilitation plan. The street dwellers are denied of government facilities like relief, VGD cards, VGF cards, old age pension etc as they have no address.

Those in the parks and stations

Suhrawardy Uddyan and Ramna Park are the ideal places for floating sex workers. They provide services to their clients during day and night. They have to pay tolls to the Police and guards on a regular basis. The two parks are also ideal for drug addicts. The heroine users have been found willing to tell their stories. Sex Workers (SW) are willing to pose for photography. The number of SWs is big at Sadarghat Launch Terminal. A 76-year-old SW, who is still active in earning through sub-contracting other young SWs, has been found at Mirpur Mazar area. These sex workers live in an unhygienic condition and infected with scabies and other STDs. Most of the dwellers of Osmani Uddayan are addicted to *ganja* and heroine. The platform of Kamalapur Railway Station is open for the floating people to sleep on, but the adjacent walls, boundaries and slums are used as the places for sex work.

The park-based SWs are habituated to and interested in interviews. They expect something including cash from the interviewers. The argument is straight forward: "You will get money selling my interview; what is the harm for me to get a share?" They are also willing to pose for photographs. The SWs want a family like any ordinary Bangali girl, but they understand that men do not believe them, as they are prostitutes. Some of the SWs fell in love with some specific clients, with whom she shared food and did not take money for sex, but in most cases they were cheated. To earn more money they have to take more than 7-8 customers a day, which is very painful and they have to take medicines to reduce the pain. Eviction of brothels by the government without proper plan for SWs' rehabilitation dragged them to start their trade in the streets. Some INGOs (CARE, Concern) and NGOs support the SWs to ensure their rights and develop their capacity to manage their own organisations. These organisations also work for awareness raising among the SWs about STDs, HIV/AIDS and safe sex. Marie Stopes provides free medical services to the SWs and aware them of HIV/AIDS. Some NGO workers distribute condoms among the sex workers. Respondents denied telling about their wealth.

JOBEDA DREAMS OF A TINY FAMILY

Twenty years old Jobeda hails from Gaibandha district. Now either Ramna Park or footpath of Shahabagh has become her permanent home. In order to manage three meals a day Jobeda had to accept the most unwelcome profession in our society. She begs at daytime and works as a call girl/prostitute at night. Jobeda knew that she chose a disgraceful profession, yet she had to accept it for her subsistence.

Jobeda's life is a typical story of anguish and suffering. She belonged to a very poor family, her parents died of a tragic accident when she was only 14. She got shelter at one of her paternal uncle's house, where she was treated as a maidservant. Moreover, she had to allow the torture from her aunt and cousins for trivial mistakes. She became crazy for liberty. One day she contacted a so-called grandmother from neighboring village and fled the home with her to Dhaka. She took shelter at the High Court Mazar premises for some days. Realizing her helpless situation the woman also started exploiting her spending all the money she earned through daylong toil. Jobeda used to beg and she had to hand all her earning to the woman, if otherwise she used to torture her. Jobeda fled again from her custody. One day she met a rickshaw puller named Alamgir. He promised to marry Jobeda, which indeed was a fake commitment, difficult for naive Jobeda to comprehend. She however surrendered her completely,

which resulted in free mixing. After some days she proposed Alamgir to marry her but subsequently denied, which traumatized Jobeda. Jobeda could not bear the mental agony and humiliation inflicted upon her out of this relation. Having deceived by the most trust-worthy person she decided to take prostitution as the easiest way for her earning. Now she begs at daytime and works as a prostitute at night. She earns Taka 30-40 a day. Her customers include rickshaw pullers, night guards of the park, and hooligans/mastans. The dark parks are normally the ideal place for having sex, she informed. She has to meet with at least 5/6 persons per night, which is very painful. Yet she is compelled to have sex with Mastans without any payment and face torture if she dares. Often she becomes sick but there is none to look after her.

Asked about her dreams she said, "I want a home, a nice family of my own where there will be none other than my husband, children and I." She made a passionate appeal to this interviewer, "Can you arrange my marriage?"

Floating sex workers are vulnerable to the threat of HIV/AIDS

It is found from the study that most of the sex workers are not aware of safe sex. They do not have any idea about HIV/AIDS and the possible pathways for its transmission. Therefore, they do not bother to take any precautionary measures to prevent it. They do not have choices either. The clients are also not aware of it.

The dreaming children

Children are full of dreams, unlike the adults who just have to bother about fulfilling their minimum requirement. Children are not interested in saving money because of lack of future plan and also lack of trust. Children are angry with the rich people, as they do not allow them to watch TV, do not give them good food, toys to play while they work in the households. Boys are sometimes used for anal sex. The children do not have any future direction or plan. Few of them earn a lot, but do not save. One boy informed that he ate *chanachur muri* of Tk. 20 by lunchtime. The Aparajeo Bangladesh runs some Drop in Centres (DICs) for the street children. Their children are smarter than others. The DICs have the facilities for bath, healthcare and education free of cost.

Children have found to be the most vulnerable group to be involved in dangerous crimes such as illegal arms, explosives, and drug bearers, pick pocketing, informer of the hoodlums, mugging, and even killing.

SURUJ: AN UNDAUNTED WARRIOR OF LIFE

Suruj Mia hails from village Melando of Jamalpur district. Ten years old Suruj by now have encountered many harsh realities of life. Three years back he fled home to escape the torture and oppression perpetrated on him by his stepmother and moved to Dhaka to set him free from the chain he was tied with and a newer struggle of his life started. Indeed Suruj has never been happy in life. Just two years after his birth Suruj lost his mother dragging him into a gloomy state. His father married another woman immediately after his mother's death. He grew up at his stepmothers' house amidst immense physical and mental agony. She never treated him well. He was denied of even three meals a day and had to listen to abusing terms while having meals. Even he was subjected to physical and mental torture in front of his father, who was supposed to shoulder Suruj's responsibilities.

Suruj was very enthusiastic to read in schools and a number of times he requested his father to get him admitted into school, but was always denied. Suruj could not read and he had to suppress his longing for education. On the contrary he used to beg and bring vegetables and often fishes from Bazar for the family at least twice a week. He had to endure mental and physical torture from her stepmother if he by any chance missed it. His father never tried to save him rather used to remain silent instead. Though he was young Suruj realized that he would not be able to stay here for long and decided to set himself free out of such humiliation, mental trauma and sufferings. Meanwhile one of Suruj's aunt extended a helping hand to him and brought him to Dhaka. She started working as a domestic help to a house but lost the job just after 2 months and again was thrown into grave uncertainty. Finding no alternative they (Suruj and his aunt) started begging on the street, continued for two years, which earned them three meals a day. Days were passing somehow. One day Suruj lost her aunt in the crowd. He met another woman whom she used to call aunt. His new aunt used to make cakes (Pitha) at Shahbagh crossing. After working with her for some days he earned her credence. She pays him Taka 12 per day along with a free meal, which Suruj uses to save to eat at dinner. He usually does not take lunch. He has become habituated not to have a lunch. The only wealth he has now are two torn off shirts and a Lungi, which he has bought from the money he saves. He enjoys watching TV programs at the roadside TV showrooms, which is the only means for his recreation. He loves to go to Children's Park. He had never been sick after coming to Dhaka but he has seen many to become sick.

Suruj got knowledge of small business. He is intelligent and dreams of having his own Pan-Bidi shop at roadside. He knows that he needs at least Tk. 1500 to materialize his dream. He has been trying his level best to do so. In the process so far he saved Tk. 140 and kept it with one of his aunt, on whom he has full trust. Suruj knows that the days of sufferings will be over once he starts his own shop.

He is not afraid of hard labour. He becomes emotional when he recalls his mother. He was devoid and deprived of motherly affection, father's love, for which he has a craving. He understands that his mother will never come. Apart from this Suruj is comparatively happy, as he is free here, none to scold and torture him. Nevertheless the green fields, open sky, rivers always beacon him to embrace them. He made an ardent appeal to all concerned to come forward in helping thousands of Suruj in our country bringing them out of poverty and giving them a meaning of life.

Shadow Administration

There are leaders for the street dwellers who control them. The leaders resolve conflicts, negotiate with the police, and often collect tolls from them. Each of such leaders, usually known as *mastans* has his own catchment area and tries to confine him within that territory. In some cases the local *mastans* snatches the belongings of the poor.

Street, not slum

Most of them prefer to stay in the street instead of *slums* for freedom. They hardly enjoy living in the *slums*. They are not obligated to pay rent, tolls etc while they are in the street.

Street dwellers dream a happier life

The street dwellers do have dreams. They dream to lead a happier life. A significant portion of the surveyed street dwellers (24%) while saying that they want to be happy have not been able to define happiness i.e. what happiness they have been talking about. This seems to be only natural, because the situations they live in do not allow they realise how happy

people can be and what the elements of happiness are. They only know that they are not happy at present. Very few of the respondents (only 12 of 366) wish to go back to the village. Interestingly, many of the surveyed street dwellers have expressed their dream of staying in their current profession, however low the profile is (e.g. *kooli*). The only thing they wish is a legal and social recognition (e.g. licence) so that they are not tortured by anybody. It indicates how realistic even their dreams are. Tble 3-13 presents the dreams of the surveyed street dwellers.

Table 3-1: Distribution of respondents by their level education:

Illiterate	<V	V – VIII	IX +	Total
155	160	37	14	366
42.35%	43.72%	10.11%	3.82%	100 %

Table 3-2: Distribution of respondent according by daily average income

Tk. 10-20	Tk. 21-30	Tk. 31-40	Tk.41-60	Tk. 61-80	Tk. 81+	Total no. of respondent
34	52	71	88	58	63	366
9.29%	14.21%	19.40%	24.04%	15.85%	17.21%	100%

Table 3-3: Distribution of respondent by number of meals per day:

1 time	2 times	3 times	Total respondent
7	130	229	366
1.91%	35.52%	62.57%	100%

Table 3-4: Distribution of respondent by amount of savings they have

Nil	100-200	201-300	301-500	501+	Total no. of respondent
246	17	16	30	57	366
67.21%	4.64%	4.37%	8.20%	15.57%	100%

Table 3-5: Distribution of respondent by frequency of changing addresses

Do not change	Often change	Total respondent
254	112	366
69.40%	30.60%	100%

Table 3-6: Distribution of respondent by reasons of coming to Dhaka

Poverty	Parents died	Torture / out of anger	River erosion	Search for food	Lost	Torture of step mother	Others	Total respondents
98	68	65	13	53	16	15	38	366
26.77	18.58	17.76	3.55	14.48	4.37	4.09	10.38	100%

Table 3-7: Distribution of respondent by their choice to stay in Dhaka

Yes	No	No response	Total no. of respondent
282	75	9	366
77.05%	20.50%	2.45%	100%

Table 3-8: Distribution of respondent by the agents they are tortured by

None	Police	Mastans	Gate keepers	Neighbours	Others	Total no. of respondents
201	87	17	26	6	29	366
54.92%	23.77%	4.64%	7.10%	1.64%	7.92%	100%

Table 3-9: Distribution of respondent according to their use of toilet:

Public toilet	Road side	Mazar/ others	Total no. of respondent
226	97	44	366
61.75%	26.23%	12.02%	100%

Table 3-10: Distribution of respondent by sources of water

Supply	Pond/ river	Hotel/ Mosque	Total no. of respondent
174	92	100	366
47.54%	25.14%	27.32%	100%

Table 3-11: Distribution of respondent by the places they go for medication

Quacks	Medicine shop	No where	Total no. of respondent
97	231	38	366
26.50%	63.11%	10.38%	100%

Table 3-12: Distribution of respondent according to their entertainment aids

Cinema	TV	Playing cards	Song	Ludu	Kori khela	Keram board	None	Others	Total
93	124	8	15	18	7	10	29	62	366
25.41%	33.88%	2.19%	4.50%	4.92%	1.91%	2.73%	7.92%	16.94%	100%

Table 3-13: Distribution of respondent by their desire to lead their life in the future

Desired way of life	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Job	42	11.48
Business	47	12.84
Back to village	12	3.26
Garments	6	1.64
Own rickshaw	3	0.82
Be happy	87	23.77
Becoming rich	27	7.3
Kooli (licensed)	42	11.48
Want work	29	7.92
Study	13	3.55
Driver	8	2.19
Live with parents	28	7.65
Others	22	6.01
Total no. of respondents	366	100

IV

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

A colossal number of street dwellers are the present reality of Dhaka, which has now become a Mega City. This huge number is putting pressure on the existing structure of the society. These people are the most vulnerable group with respect to many social ills. The government does not have any specific plan to rehabilitate them other than eviction of the slums, which only add to this already huge number of floating population. But things have to be changed. The problems of these street dwellers do not deserve to be ignored. From the study findings, a number of recommendations can be put forward.

A Comprehensive Baseline Study: Identifying the street dwellers and having a comprehensive understanding of their realities is the first step to move forward with these homeless people. Several studies have been attempted so far by the government and a number of non-government organisations. But none so far filled the gap of a comprehensive baseline. The *Census of Slum Areas and Floating Population 1997* has not covered the whole range of street dwellers. Given all these, it has now become extremely important to carry out comprehensive quantitative and qualitative studies on the street dwellers of Dhaka city to not only estimate the size of this population but also to assess their needs and analyse their situation.

Special Needs Interventions: The problems of the street dwellers cannot be addressed by interventions directed towards alleviation of urban poverty. They need special types of programmes as they are special categories of people. Since, unlike poor people in rural areas, these people are not concentrated in particular locations, undertaking effective interventions is challenging, no doubt. That is why special attention has to be given to undertaken specially designed programmes for addressing the needs of these people.

A Definite Plan for Rehabilitation: Addressing or even solving the problems of the street dwellers is not going to be permanent as long as they remain in the streets. A definite plan of rehabilitation for them will be needed to reach sustainable solutions to their problems. Therefore, the government has to come up with such a plan or plans as soon as possible. Otherwise the size of this population will augment and problems regarding will keep on increasing.

Whatever the steps we talk of will remain in words unless there is any genuine intention of doing something for the street dwellers. It seems there is a widespread lack of such intention. We readily blame these people for most of the crimes and violence in the city, but we don't try to realise the reality they live in. But we have to realise that they are the citizens of this country and they are entitled to the basic rights that the others enjoy.

Special Interventions for the Children:

Sporadic project based approach or business as usual type of intervention for the huge number of street children conducted during the past has not made any significant contribution to ameliorate the miserable plight of the children. The situation demands for undertaking programmatic approach and special interventions in a large scale to address the emerging needs not only for the street children themselves but also for the city managers, policy makers and planners. The latter can in no case afford to turn a blind eye to the potentially growing population of the city both in terms of tapping enormous potentials of the floating children to be better utilized in the development of urban economy and ensuring good governance to be used as a good conduit for equity, accountability and justice.

Life-skills and Skill-based Training:

The citizens referred as missing need to be imparted with sufficient training on life-skills so that they could cope with the hostile situation and survive in whatever condition they may face. Likewise, the skill-based training appears to be turning a potentially significant input to their lives. Side by side, there is a need for establishing a forward linkage for them with the job market by job counselling and widening the market network for them. This will hopefully provide opportunity for them to increase their income in a sustainable fashion.